DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 534 CG 012 482

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TITLE Psychopolitical Orientations of White and Black Youth: A Test of Five Models.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (72nd, Chicago, Illinois, September 5-9, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Attitudes; Blacks; Caucasians; Locus of Control; *Political Socialization; Quality of Life; *Racial Differences; Research Projects; Self Esteem; *Social Psychology; Violence

ABSTRACT

This study investigates five models of psychopolitical orientations of black and white youth: (1) perceptions of life satisfaction; (2) perceptions of self-competence; (3) perceptions of sociopolitical reality; (4) feelings of political alienation; and (5) attitudes of political violence justification. Subjects were 970 St. Louis inner-city high school students. Written questionnaires were utilized to obtain data. Data were analyzed with several psychological measures. Results indicate that race has a significant effect on perceptions of sociopolitical reality and on political violence justification but not on perceptions of life satisfaction, perceptions of self-competence, or on feelings of political alienation. The major differences in psychopolitical orientations between white and black adolescents suggest that the above perspectives have been internalized, and have become an integral part of the black political socialization process. (Author/JLL)

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PSYCHOPOLITICAL ORIENTATIONS OF WHITE AND BLACK YOUTH: A TEST OF FIVE MODELS

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Prepared for delivery at the 1977 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, 5-9 September.

The assistance of the students, teachers, and administrators of the St. Louis Public School System in the completion of this research is gratefully acknowledged. Support for this research was provided by the Department of Political Science and the Political Psychology Program, Yale University. Computer time for this research was furnished by the Yale University Computer Center.

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ABSTRACT

In a survey of 970 St. Louis inner-city high school students, race was found to have a significant effect on perceptions of sociopolitical reality and on political violence justification, not on perceptions of life satisfaction, perceptions of self-competence, or on feelings of political alienation.

Psychopolitical Orientations of White and Black Youth: A Test of Five Models

> The undippable flag was a beauty, and the anthem and the vacant motto might not have mattered much, if it weren't for this: a lot of citizens were so ignored and cheated and insulted that they thought they might be in the wrong country, or even on the wrong planet, that some terrible mistake had been made. It might have comforted them some if their anthem and their motto had mentioned fairness or brotherhood or hope or happiness, had somehow welcomed them to the society and its real estate.
>
> --Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1973: 9)

Race appears to be a major factor affecting the process of political socialization, particularly as it relates to the development of psychopolitical orientations among preadults (Sears, 1975: 106-111). Unfortunately, however, the empirical research in this area is somewhat limited, while theoretical and speculative material seems somewhat more prevalent (Clark, 1965: Grier and Cobbs, 1968; Silberman, 1964). This state of affairs has resulted in either little or no consideration of certain subjects in the political socialization process as it applies to both whites and blacks, or it has resulted in generalizations concerning this process being founded on both dated, unrepresentative research and speculative assumptions. To complicate the situation even further, the extant empirical research on white and black socialization indicates, first, that a number of the fundamental assumptions underlying the subject may be fallacious (McCarthy and Yancey, 1971; Perry and Feagin, 1972), and, second, that the reliability of early empirical findings may be questionable today (Abramson, 1972).

With these considerations in mind, therefore, the research reported here, based on recent survey data collected from adolescents, both white

and black, residing in a large midwestern city, will address itself to two basic questions: 1) How does race influence the psychopolitical orientations of white and black adolescents? and 2) If race does have an impact, on which dimensions is it most pronounced? In short, using a multivariate approach, an attempt will be made to determine the relative effect of race on adolescents' political orientations.

In exploring this hypothesized racial influence, five models of psychopolitical orientation will be compared. Whereas these different models need not be mutually exclusive in investigating white and black preadults' political orientations, they will be treated separately for heuristic purposes in the subsequent analysis. The first of these models, the life satisfaction model, assumes that one of the major differences occurring between white and black individuals, both preadult and adult, concerns the level of perceived life satisfaction exhibited by each racial group (Cantril, 1965; Cantril and Roll, 1971; Long, 1976b; Long, 1977b; Watts and Free, 1974). Adherents of this model typically assume that when such personal levels of life satisfaction are assessed, white individuals more commonly express higher satisfaction levels than do black individuals. This difference between the races is then used to explain different outcomes in the political socialization process when the races are compared (Sears and McConahay, 1973; Feagin and Hahn, 1973; Gamson, 1968).

The self-competence model is another means whereby different socialization patterns and results can be accounted for (Abramson, 1972). In this instance, reference is made to levels of self-esteem and locus of control (Smith, 1968; White, 1972). Here, four schools of thought can be discerned. The first, and more frequently encountered, asserts that white preadults, relative

to black preadults, manifest higher feelings of self-esteem (Banks and Grambs, 1972), while at the same time displaying beliefs that they personally control their fate and are less subject to the influence of others or to their environment (Phares, 1976: 44-45). Obviously, both factors are relative and not absolute, but, on both, the first school assumes that whites display more personal competence than blacks. The second school holds that these personality factors do not typically differentiate whites from blacks because the developmental assumptions posited by the first school are invalid (Baughman, 1971). Thus, the second school states that no major differences in salient personality dimensions, especially regarding perceptions of self-esteem, occur between white and black preadults. The third school argues that, primarily because of the black familial structure and because of efforts to compensate for societal discrimination and social deprivation (Heinz, 1971; Scanzoni, 1971; TenHouten, 1970), blacks tend to possess higher levels of self-esteem (Long, 1974b; Long, 1975a; Long, 1975c; Rosenberg and Simmons, 1971). Finally, a more distinct position, less germane to this discussion, assumes the existence of a distinct black personality, which cannot be readily compared with the personalities of whites on these particular dimensions. In a sense, this fourth school, assuming the existence of a distinct black personality, can be found in the social science literature, but it is not especially germane to this discussion (Mosby, 1972). To return to the central topic, therefore, the most frequently found assumption in the literature asserts that blacks exhibit lower self-esteem and more external control beliefs than whites. According to the self-competence model, then, on the basis of these differences in personality, differences in political socialization outcomes for the two

races can be explained.

The third model emerging in the political socialization literature pertains to differential perceptions of political reality. This model suggests that black preadults, as compared to white preadults, are more cognizant of and more sensitive to conditions inherent in the social structure which produce sociopolitical inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and neglect (Laurence, 1970; Prestage, 1969). This awareness, according to the political reality model, is a direct consequence of black preadults' experiential histories, as well as the proximity of these problems to their daily lives (Coles, 1975). These perceptions on the part of black preadults, therefore, both result in distinctive political socialization outcomes, as well as act as potent mediators in attempts to alter those outcomes (Long, 1975b; Long, 1977a; Long, 1977c).

The political alienation model, closely linked to the preceding model, posits a difference in the extent to which white and black preadults relate to the sociopolitical system, with the black group exhibiting higher levels of political alienation. In this context, two indicators are frequently employed, feelings of political powerlessness and feelings of political distrust (Long, 1974a; Long, 1974b; Long, 1974d; Long, 1975d; Long, 1976d). Again, since they manifest higher levels of both political inefficacy and political distrust, distinctive patterns of political behavior and political socialization among blacks are assumed to follow these feelings, according to the model (Long, 1975a). Of the five models considered in this paper, the political alienation model is perhaps the most frequently encountered in the social science literature and the model most firmly based on empiri-

cal research, relating to both preadults and adults. Thus, this model would predict that race exerts a major impact on feelings of political alienation, with blacks revealing greater feelings of inefficacy and distrust (Clarke, 1973; Orum and Cohen, 1973).

The last model, that dealing with political violence justification, emerges most typically from the extant research on urban unrest over the past ten years (Davies, 1973). This research has rather consistently shown that riot participants, riot observers, residents of riot areas, and sympathizers with rioters tend to condone the use of violence to achieve political goals (Feagin and Hahn, 1973; Masotti and Bowen, 1968; Sears and McConahay, 1973). Needless to say, all of these groups have been comprised almost entirely of black persons. A second body of research, just emerging, relates specifically to the attitudes of both white and black preadults not involved directly in overt manifestations of urban violence. This research has rather consistently shown that black preadults are much more willing to justify the use of political violence, as compared to white preadults; and, furthermore, the former group is also more prone to indicate an intention to actually engage in such activity under certain circumstances (Long, 1975c). The political violence justification model rather consistently, then, would predict that one of the most potent factors fostering political violence justification is race, with black preadults exhibiting higher levels of approbation.

As the result of this discussion, five hypotheses emerge for empirical test:

H_1 One predictor of perceptions of life satisfaction among preadults is race.

H_2 One predictor of perceptions of self-competence among preadults is race.

H_3 One predictor of perceptions of sociopolitical reality among preadults is race.

H_4 One predictor of feelings of political alienation among preadults is race.

H_5 One predictor of attitudes of political violence justification among preadults is race.

Sample. A written questionnaire was used in this study to record the responses of 970 students enrolled in five inner-city schools in St. Louis in December, 1974. Randomly selected social studies classes in each school were the source of the sample for this study; in all cases, these courses were part of the required curriculum in each school. All surveys were administered by the students' teachers, who were provided with complete instructions for the administration of questionnaires and who read a written statement to their students explaining the purpose of the research and guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of individual results.

Males comprised 43 percent of the sample, 57 percent were females; 57 percent were white, 38 percent were black, and 5 percent, who were aggregated with the blacks in the data analysis, indicated other racial-ethnic origins. Eleven percent of the students were enrolled in the ninth grade, 31 percent in the tenth grade, 37 percent in the eleventh grade, and 19 percent were enrolled in the twelfth grade. The modal parental

education level for the students was twelve years of formal education. Eighteen percent of the sample reported having A grade-point-averages, 45 percent with GPAs of B, 33 percent with GPAs of C, and 4 percent with GPAs of D or below. No significant demographic differences occur when the white and black samples are compared, probably because both groups reside in inner-city St. Louis. Furthermore, all students sampled attended integrated schools with integrated teaching staffs.

Conceptual Indicators. Two measures were utilized as operationalizations of the concepts intrinsic to the life satisfaction model in this study. The first was a modified nine-step version of Cantril's self-anchoring striving scale (1965: 21-29). As in the original form of the scale, respondents were requested to place themselves on a scale ranging from rung number one (their worst possible life) to rung number nine (their best possible life) for three separate time periods, the present (1974), five years in the past (1969), and five years in the future (1979). Perceived gratification level was then operationalized by using the sum of the adolescents' responses across the three temporal referents. This measure attained a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.80.

The second indicator of perceived life satisfaction, the perceived comparison level index, which was original with this study, consisted of a four-item index measuring the respondents' comparisons of 1) their families' situations compared to most people, 2) their job opportunities compared to most people, 3) their income earning opportunities compared to most people, and 4) their chances of finding satisfactory housing compared

to most people. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 was exhibited by this indicator. And the correlation between these two life satisfaction measures was 0.51.

The first component of the self-competence model, self-esteem, was measured by means of Rosenberg's (1965) ten-item self-esteem scale (alpha= 0.89) and by an eight-item self-evaluation semantic differential scale (Long, 1974d), which was constructed through the use of a factor analysis with an orthogonal rotation, factor iteration, and placement of squared multiple correlations on the main diagonal elements. The eight items extracted from the factor analysis all loaded on the first factor derived with factor loadings in excess of 0.60, accounted for 85 percent of the total variance, and achieved an alpha of 0.95.

Locus of control, the second element in the self-competence model, was measured by Levenson's (1973) five-item chance control (alpha= 0.67) and powerful others control (alpha= 0.58) scales, two subscales of the multidimensional locus of control concept. The mean interscale correlation between the self-competence indicators was 0.30.

Five scales were used in operationalizing the perceived sociopolitical reality model in this study. The perceived racial discrimination scale (Long, 1976c) measured the extent to which the adolescents viewed the political system as being racially discriminatory (alpha= 0.67); the adolescents' views concerning the existence of economic discrimination were measured by Long's (1976c) perceived economic discrimination scale (alpha= 0.79); the perceived system blame scale (Gurin, et al., 1969) provided information on the respondents' delegation of responsibility for the plight of blacks to the political system, rather than to blacks themselves (alpha=

0.70); the perceived black political inefficacy scale (Long, 1976c) was used to measure the adolescents' view that the political system was unresponsive to the needs and demands of blacks (alpha= 0.83); and the degree to which the subjects perceived the political system as lacking justification for black trust was indicated on Long's (1976c) perceived black political distrust scale (alpha= 0.68). These indicators manifested a mean intercorrelation of 0.50.

The political alienation model was operationalized through the use of four attitudinal measures: 1) Olsen's (1969) four-item political incapability scale (alpha= 0.64), 2) the six-item political cynicism scale (alpha= 0.83) of Agger, et al.(1961), 3) Olsen's (1969) four-item political discontentment scale (alpha= 0.74), and 4) Long's four-item scale (alpha= 0.66) measuring political estrangement. The mean correlation between the political alienation scales was 0.41.

Four indicators were employed to test the political violence justification model. First, the utilitarian political violence justification scale (Long, 1975d) was used to measure the adolescents' attitudes concerning the functional basis of violence to achieve political objectives in the system (alpha= 0.63). The normative political violence justification scale (Long, 1975d) provided information on the subjects' attitudes regarding the ethical grounds for resorting to violence to gain political ends (alpha= 0.74). On the third measure, the unconventional political behavior scale (Long, 1975d), the primary concern dealt with the adolescents' acceptance or rejection of specific forms of nontraditional political behavior (alpha= 0.54). Finally, the most extreme indicator in this set, the political revenge scale (Long, 1975d), was utilized to investigate the degree to which

the respondents condoned political assassination as a means of achieving desired sociopolitical reform (alpha= 0.74). A mean correlation of 0.61 was exhibited between the four political violence justification scales.

Results. As a means of testing the five hypotheses guiding this study, the relative effect of the racial variable on the five orientations investigated will be established through the utilization of multiple regression analysis, which will simultaneously control for the extraneous effects of four other categoric-demographic factors on the adolescents' orientations: 1) their levels of parental education, employed as an indicator of socioeconomic status; 2) their grade levels, used as a measure of developmental maturity; 3) their grade-point-averages, serving as indicators of general intelligence and sociopolitical sophistication; and 4) their sexes, used primarily as indicators of political role perspectives. If this study's hypotheses are to be confirmed, the race variable should contribute in a statistically significant fashion to each of the five psychopolitical orientations.

The first hypothesis posits a relationship between race and perceptions of life satisfaction, with black adolescents exhibiting perceptions of lower satisfaction compared to their white counterparts. The beta weights in Table 1 indicate that this is clearly not the case. Indeed, the race variable is found to be unrelated to perceived life satisfaction among the St. Louis adolescents. On the other hand, both socioeconomic status and grade-point-average are slightly related to such perceptions, with satisfaction being associated with higher status and higher grades. Hypothesis one is disconfirmed.

Most of the literature on preadults suggests that relative to whites,

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC-CATEGORIC VARIABLES REGRESSED ON PSYCHOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION INDICATORS

	SES	GRADE	GPA	SEX	RACE	r^2
Life Satisfaction						
Perceived Gratification	14					.02
Perceived Comparison Level	08	08	14	-07		.04
Composite Index	15		12			.04
Self-Competence						
Self-Esteem		14	15	-08	12	.07
Self-Evaluation	14		15	-09	22	.11
Chance Control	-13			15		.04
Powerful Others Control	-10					.01
Composite Index	14	08	17	-12	17	.10
Sociopolitical Reality						
Racial Discrimination					50	.25
Economic Discrimination		13		-12	10	.04
System Blame					31	.10
Black Political Inefficacy					33	.10
Black Political Distrust					51	.27
Composite Index					50	.26
Political Alienation						
Political Incapability	-15	-10	-11	10		.06
Political Cynicism		18				.03
Political Discontentment						
Political Estrangement	-16		-08	12		.05
Composite Index	-15			10		.04
Political Violence Justification						
Utilitarian Justification		-11	-12		09	.04
Normative Justification		-08			16	.03
Unconventional Behavior					20	.04
Political Revenge		-16	-12		13	.06
Composite Index		-13	-10		19	.06

NOTE: Decimals have been omitted and all standardized regression coefficients are equal to twice their standard errors.

blacks manifest lower levels of self-competence. The standardized regression coefficients in Table 1 show that this assumption does not hold for the adolescents surveyed. In this instance, the positive betas show that black adolescents possess higher levels of self-esteem and self-evaluation. The locus of control measures, however, are found to be independent of the race variable, although low SES is slightly associated with external control beliefs. On the basis of these results, then, the second hypothesis is accorded some support, but the direction of the hypothesized relationship typically found in the social science literature is not supported.

The third hypothesis suggests that race serves as a good predictor of adolescents' perceptions of sociopolitical reality, with black adolescents displaying more critical perceptions than white adolescents. According to the beta weights in Table 1, this is clearly the case among the St. Louis adolescents. In fact, 25 percent of the variance in the composite sociopolitical reality indicator is accounted for by the race factor, primarily because of the black adolescents' perceptions about pervasive racial discrimination and about the lack of grounds for political trust among blacks. This hypothesis receives moderate to strong support.

Hypothesis four, emerging from the extant work on black political behavior, predicts a causal link between race and political alienation, in this instance, with higher levels of political alienation being found among black adolescents. As the standardized regression coefficients in Table 1 indicate, this prediction is not met when the St. Louis adolescents' political attitudes are investigated. Whereas race is unrelated

to political alienation for this group, socioeconomic status, grade level, grade-point-average, and sex are found to be slightly related to feelings of alienation from the political system. Thus, political alienation is shown to be associated with lower SES, lower GPAs, and to occur more frequently among females. Interestingly, grade level is positively correlated with political distrust and negatively correlated with political powerlessness. Hypothesis four is disconfirmed.

The last hypothesis suggests that the justification of violence to achieve political ends will not only be related to race, but that such justification will be higher among black adolescents than among white adolescents. The betas in Table 1 indicate that this is correct, especially regarding the use of unconventional political behavior, e.g., confrontational and violent tactics to effect political change. It is also noteworthy that lower levels of SES and lower GPAs are associated with political violence justification among these adolescents. Hypothesis five is, therefore, supported, although little variance is accounted for in the relationship.

Conclusion. Two basic findings follow from this analysis. First, of the two psychosocial models used to explain black socialization patterns and political behavior, the life satisfaction and self-competence models, only the latter receives support here and then only to a slight degree. Second, of the political models cited, the political reality model receives moderate to strong support and the political violence justification model receives weak support.

What are the implications of these findings? Each of the five models

of black political socialization investigated in this paper rests on certain fundamental assumptions relevant to adolescent psychology, as well as the normal functioning of the sociopolitical system. Obviously, the support or lack of support accorded these different models by the St. Louis data has major consequences regarding the theoretical status of these models. For example, the individual-blame assumptions inherent in the life satisfaction and self-competence models, especially when combined in the social deprivation model of black socialization, receive little validation (Long, 1976a). Not only does this model posit the existence of personal psychopathology on the part of the preadult, i.e., feelings of deprivation and low self-competence, but the state of the sociopolitical system in which the individual is situated is simply not considered (Long, 1974c). Thus, the possibility of system disfunctioning or failure in this model is not taken into account.

On the other hand, the three models dealing specifically with the individual's perceptions of system functioning are much more cognizant of the individual's reactions to the operation of the sociopolitical system and, at the same time, are more open to the possibility of the individual accurately perceiving the system's operation, as well as rationally responding to it (Abramson, 1972). Coles provides an illustration of this point in his description of encounters he has experienced with disadvantaged children in this country:

> A black child of eight in rural Mississippi, or in a northern ghetto, an Indian or Chicano or Appalachian child, can sound like a disillusioned old radical: down with the system, because it's a thoroughly unjust one, for all that one hears in school--including, especially, those words quoted from the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution: that 'all men are

> created equal,' that they are 'endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.'
>
> The pledge of allegiance to the flag can be an occasion for boredom, at the very least, among some elementary school children; the phrase 'with liberty and justice for all' simply rings hollow, or is perceived as an ironic boast meant to be uttered by others elsewhere (1975: 259).

This system-blame orientation appears also in recent descriptions of the trend toward increased political alienation in the United States, particularly as the phenomenon is evidenced among blacks. In this case, though, the alienated response is conceptualized as an aggressive rejection of the existing sociopolitical system, not as a passive withdrawal from it with a latent desire for eventual re-entry:

> The subsequent decline in trust among blacks in 1968 can perhaps be best explained as a natural outcome of the clash between quickly rising expectations and the realism of slow-moving system changes. The data, however, suggest more than just unfulfilled expectations. It seems that the Watts riot of 1965 and the Detroit and Newark riots of 1967 correspond to a change in black attitudes toward whites and a shift from a 'moving toward' to a 'moving against' strategy. This new strategy was characterized by increasing demands for black control of schools, public facilities and political institutions in black areas, the mobilization of large numbers of blacks in urban ghettos, the development of a more militant, nationalistic leadership, a growing sense of black pride and identity among blacks that probably promoted identification of middle-class blacks with the majority of the black population for whom system rewards had not expanded noticeably, an upsurge in system blame and, correspondingly, an increased willingness to strike out violently at white-dominated property and institutions. Thus, this was indeed a period of rapidly changing attitudes among blacks, one in which a previously positive attachment to the political system was replaced by a profound sense of political estrangement (Miller, et al., 1973).

Finally, interpretations analogous to those reported here regarding sentiments toward political violence justification among blacks are also cited in the social science literature, particularly as they relate to

black perceptions of systemic unresponsiveness to conventional input modes and of structural barriers to greater black political influence. This political violence interpretation is best exemplified by Feagin and Hahn who write that

> . . . this politics of violence perspective emphasizes that the rioting of ghetto residents represented a demand to change both the outcomes of day-to-day decisions and the overall decision-making process itself. The dissidence generated by the failure of the processes of city government and electoral politics to satisfy the demands of black Americans yielded a growing recognition that this failure was not produced solely by the intransigence of those public officials in office at any point in time. There was also a critical flaw in any political structure, including governmental arrangements, that prevents an emergent minority within its midst from securing the political goals they seek. Thus the outbreak of ghetto violence and the subsequent growth of demands for self-determination, community control, and the decentralization of political authority were more than coincidental. Both during the ghetto riots themselves and in the movement for community control that accompanied later riots, black Americans seemed to be pressing a demand for significant powers of self-governance and for the right to control their own lives and destinies (1973: 54-55).

The unambiguous results reported here regarding the major differences in psychopolitical orientations between white and black adolescents would suggest that not only have the above perspectives been internalized by black preadults, but they have also become an integral part of the black political socialization process.

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